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Le Budget Participatif de Lisbonne : résultats et perspectives d'une expérience en transformation continue

El Presupuesto Participativo de Lisboa: resultados y perspectivas de una experiencia en lenta pero continua transformación

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The Lisbon Participatory Budget: results and perspectives on an experience in slow but continuous transformation

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Abstract. Since 2008, Lisbon has been the first European capital to adopt a Participatory Budget (PB) process at a municipal scale to involve its inhabitants in the elaboration and ranking of the proposals to be included in a predetermined slice of the city council's budget. Lisbon's process has become a benchmark for various similar experiences, both in Portugal and abroad. It brought innovative elements into the international debate, such as the use of new technologies to present and rank proposals, and therefore it sought to focus on the construction of a more "European" model of PB.

One of the innovative features of the Lisbon PB (Lx-PB) process - among the first to be more than merely advisory, unlike most previous experiences in Portugal - is its evolutionary nature. It allowed to capitalize and increase, over its various editions, a more inclusive matrix through enhanced dialogue with citizens and a gradual improvement of the deliberative quality, derived from various learning experiences related to errors and limits observed throughout the participatory path. This article - paying special attention to the incremental and evolutionary nature of the experiment - aims to highlight some peculiarities of the first five years of life of the Lx-PB, stressing the limits and changes over time.

Keywords. Participatory budget, Participatory democracy, Municipal innovation, Local government, Participatory methodologies, Lisbon Portugal

1. Introduction

Today, when more than 2,700 municipalities around the world have experimented with the Participatory Budget (PB)¹, it is worth reflecting on the experience of Lisbon, a country that first adapted to a European capital a participatory path originally developed in Latin America at a time when other capitals (Rome, Paris and London) only had pilot experiences at parish level, i.e. sub-municipal institutions (UN-Habitat, 2009). Currently, PB processes are ongoing in other European capitals (such as Bratislava, Reykjavik and Helsinki); however, the case of Lisbon remains an interesting one, especially because it had a broad impact in Portugal. In fact, the Lisbon PB (Lx-PB) granted nation-wide visibility and media projection to the participatory budget², thus triggering debates in various municipalities and some parties (especially the Portuguese Socialist Party and, within in, at the

highest level of its Youth Organisation, Juventude Socialista). In that way, it focused on the transformation of the panorama of the Portuguese experience. Likewise, it has become an important reference in the lusophone world, affecting the debate about PBs in Cape Verde and the restructuring of the PB of Maputo, capital of Mozambique. Also, Lisbon is today one of the cities actively involved in the so-called "Iberian Network of Participatory Budgets" which its annual event was held in Spain for the exchange of good practices, in March 2014.

Now in its sixth edition, the Lisbon Participatory Budget (Lx-PB) was one of the first in Portugal to be more than merely advisory³, seeking to confer an effective decision-making power to the citizens in defining part of the public policies of their municipality. In this sense, the experience of the Lx-PB tried to recover a central aspect (the co-decision aspect) of the original model that characterized the first

Participatory Budgets in Brazil, such as Porto Alegre, that since 1989 (Fedozzi, 2013; Baiocchi, 2005; Santos, 2003; Allegretti, 2003; Abers, 2000) represented the “icon” of the most internationally acknowledged processes of this type. This recognition is not so much for being the first experience, but rather because they have been implemented in a large state capital and in a quite radical form⁴. It should also be noted that, as happened with many European experiences (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2009), Lisbon PB distinguished itself from most of the original Brazilian processes not only for being a pilot project (limited to small slices of the municipal budget) but also because it did not place special emphasis on issues related to social inclusion and redistributive justice on behalf of the most disadvantaged social groups.

Despite these structural limitations, it managed to differentiate itself from the consultative model that prevailed in Portugal up until then. At the time there was a tendency to view the Portuguese PBs as experiences merely limited to the construction of a “proximity democracy” (Sintomer et alii, 2013): that is, capable of narrowing the internal bonds of the social fabric and the relationships between local communities and municipal institutions but not capable of developing a bold reform of the political culture in terms of redistribution of power balances, namely in what pertains to the choice of the investments to fund with municipal resources each year.

It should be noted that the first implementation of the Lisbon PB coincided not only with the worsening of the economic and financial crisis in the country but also with the territorial and operational reorganization of the Portuguese municipalities. In that period Portugal experienced a visible increase in the diffusion of innovative practices in municipal management, previously not very common (Mota, 2005).

This article seeks to analyze some peculiar features and striking transformations of the Lisbon Participatory Budget over its first five years of existence, based on the intermediate results of a comparative academic research project. These data were collected by different quantitative, qualitative and participant observation methodologies over two annual cycles of operation in 10 Portuguese Participatory Budget experiences between 2010 and the end of 2012⁵.

2. Peculiarities and evolution of the Lisbon PB.

Participatory budgets - as defined by PB-UNIT (UK institution that supports municipalities in the implementation of this type of participatory practices⁶) - are processes that “trust decisions on a portion of a municipal budget or of another budget that concerns them to the citizens of a given territory”. The literature includes them in the scope of “invitation to participate” practices (Ibarra, 2007), ranking them among the most advanced municipal innovations (Pateman 2012, Smith, 2009; Fung and Wright, 2002) for two main reasons: (1) for daring to intervene in a strategic scope of the power of the representative institutions that is seldom brought into public discussion - the distribution of public resources, and (2) for achieving focus, at the same time, on the perception of the “democratic deficit” (Norris, 2011), on the transformation of the political culture, on the reorganization of public services and on the induction of new methods of collective action.

As highlighted in the academic debate on participatory budgets (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2009; Wampler, 2007; Santos, 2003; Avritzer and Navarro, 2003), the success of these new innovations greatly depends on the balance of four factors: (1) political will, (2) organizational capacity of the social fabric of a territory, (3) autonomy and financial capacity of the promoter political entity and (4) organizational architecture (or “design”) of the participatory process.

In Lisbon, the first two elements were strengthened in 2006 due to a political crisis that hit the city, forcing the resignation of the Mayor and the new mid-term elections (with a high abstention rate).⁷ The new municipal government of minority coalition⁸, led by the Socialist António Costa, felt in 2007 the need to create consensus that went beyond the election results. Thus, it organized thematic public participation sessions and several open Decentralised Meetings in some of the 53 parishes of the municipality⁹ to collect input from citizens and associations about plans, projects and priorities of city council intervention for the following years.

Following the encouraging results of the first timid openings that targeted the creation of spaces for dialogue with the citizens, the Lisbon City Council (CML) adopted, on 9th July 2008, the “Charter of Principles” of the Participatory Budget, acknowledging the need to “proceed towards a comprehensive model of citizen participation, (...) emblematic of a new way of governing the city.” Afterwards, Proposal 833/P/2008b structured a co-decision path for a portion of the investments, up to an amount of 5 million Euros, the highest so far in Portugal and corresponding to 5.4% of the investment capacity of the municipality as it is stated by the official documents of the City Council.

In Lisbon, an experience with participatory budgeting was already in place, albeit only of an advisory nature. Located in the Parishes of Carnide, it was run by a coalition of opposition parties. Thus, the two processes were developed separately (without establishing an open dialogue) and with few methodological affinities. In this context, the Carnide PB came to be extinct in 2009, since the parish decided to contribute more actively within the City Council’s participatory path, endowed with a bigger budget and more comprehensive powers.

Today, the Lisbon PB operates in an annual cycle, which begins in the spring and continues to the summer, with several decentralized assemblies being held in the territory: these are intended for proposals for investment by the citizens, who later become the object of evaluation and technical analysis by municipal services. Then, the Provisional list of Projects to be submitted to vote is published and a period of complaints regarding the proposals analyzed is opened.

In the last quarter of the year the voting stage takes place (in October) and the public presentation of the winning projects (November/December) that close the annual cycle. To promote participation the municipality created an internet portal operated by the City Council, www.lisboaparticipa.pt; through this tool, citizens can receive information, submit proposals and vote, and - since 2013 - votes can also be submitted via SMS. The annual process culminates with the integration of the winning projects in the City Council’s Plan of Activities and Budget.

It should be noted that many of the design elements of the Lx-PB, which started in late 2008, derived from a shared reflection with other municipalities within the project “OP Portugal [PB Portugal]”, an initiative supported by the “Equal” European funding line and coordinated by the In-LoCo Association for Local Development, in cooperation with the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra and the Centre for Municipal Studies and Training and even some other Municipalities and Parishes that, since 2002, have experimented with merely advisory PB models.

In 2008, the direct influence of the “OP Portugal” project - which offered free training and consulting to build innovative experiences in shared management of public policies - had limited results, as the first edition of the Lx-PB was confined to the last quarter of the year and the interaction with the citizens was limited to the submission of proposals through a web portal not yet very user-friendly.

In the first edition there was a waste of energy and social capital of the citizens who presented investment proposals, to the extent that they could only vote a maximum of three priority thematic areas to receive funding¹⁰. The ideas proposed for the other 11 areas of competence of the City Council were not evaluated from the technical point of view nor put to the public vote. These limits clearly emerged as a result of an innovative aspect of Lisbon’s pioneering experience (not present in the other Portuguese PBs): a service for the monitoring and evaluation of the PB through questionnaires to the participants to record their satisfaction and open suggestions for transformation.

The more than 1,730 participants who voted in Lx-BP 2008 represented a tiny fraction of the population residing in the capital (564,650 inhabitants, according to INE) but their activism and commitment to the process helped improve it. The 599 questionnaires answered that year¹¹ revealed that the population became aware of the process mainly through “word of mouth” (42.7% through friends and family), which triggered dynamics of self-organization of citizens and created a high demand (72.6%) to allow for future on-site participation in territorial or thematic meetings favouring the reduction of the exclusion of people with difficulties in the use and/or access to computer technologies.

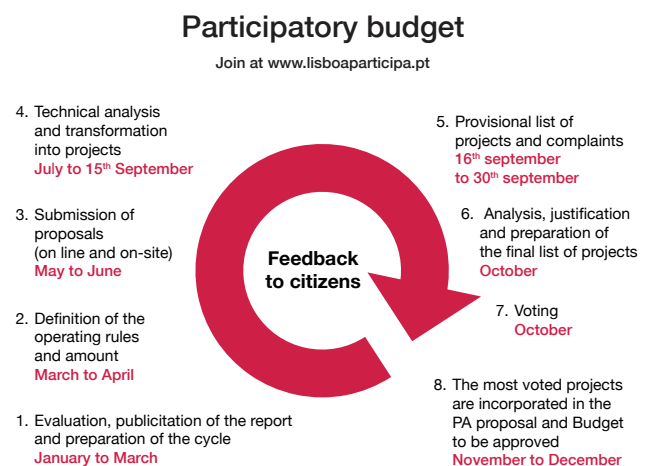
The structure of the first two editions of Lx-PB was marked by two main innovative aspects. The first relates to **universal participation**, since - from the beginning - the Lx-PB aimed to cover all individuals over 18 years old living and/or working in the municipality of Lisbon, whether they were representatives of associations and the corporate world or persons not affiliated with any organisation. The second was the **flexibility of the organizational architecture, with a view to the gradual improvement of the deliberative quality** of the process. Since its conception, the PB has remained as an open process, continually evolving and improving, as stated in the eighth article of the Charter of Principles¹².

Comparing the 2008 and 2009 cycles, we observe three significant changes: 1) the enrichment of the preparatory phase focused on building the knowledge of the different agents intervening in the PB, 2) the methodological change that put an end to the limit of three thematic areas of priority intervention that acted as an unwanted “filter” on

the autonomy of the proposals submitted by citizens; 3) the definition of clear rules of participation (simple and few in number).

By the third year (2010), the Lx-PB began to consolidate itself, using its evolutionary flexibility to balance the institutional formalism and its ability to change in accordance with the learning experiences gained. The biggest novelty of the 2012 Lx-PB was the creation of Participatory Assemblies (PAs - spaces to answer questions and formulate and discuss proposals) and Polling Stations (PSs - support spaces for those who want to cast their vote, for example those who do not have direct Internet access at home or at their work place) as well as the increase of the temporal span of the participatory cycle.

The annual cycle of participation - initially limited to the fall and early winter - gradually came to occupy the entire calendar year, integrating the phases shown in Figure 1:



Source: Câmara Municipal Lisboa [Lisbon City Council], 2010

Figure 1. Budget process and civil society engagement

The new articulation of the participatory cycle has multiplied the opportunities for debate and discussion and given participants the opportunity to submit proposals through several channels simultaneously, thereby rewarding them for the intensity of their participatory effort.

In fact, the rules provide that those only involved through the PB web portal can submit only one proposal on their own name. In contrast, at Participatory Assemblies, each participant is entitled to submit two proposals to be put to public vote.

In the Participatory Assemblies the physical space is organized into several tables (each with a moderator belonging to the staff of the Lisbon City Council and/or external collaborators) in order to facilitate the dialogue on the quality of proposals. Then, in order to foster cooperation, only the valid proposals meeting the consensus of the participants in each of the tables at which they were presented are considered. In fact, since a maximum number of proposals that can be submitted at each table is not specified, all proposals tend to be accepted by the group. This demonstrates that the tables do not work as “filters”, leading to a high risk of redundancy of proposals. Moreover, all proposals submitted by citizens at the Assemblies or electronically through the Internet Portal,

are entered in the general list and later filtered, analyzed and merged (when similar or complementary) by the City Council's PB team that then turns them into "projects". These will go to public vote in early fall of each year.

The analysis phase of the proposals (during Summer months) is the most delicate moment of the PB, since "filtering" is performed by an institutional entity and the choices made by the technicians can be perceived by citizens as "discretionary", ill-founded and – ultimately – meant to "steer" the instructions of the participants towards projects already predetermined or formatted to fit specific interests of the political institutions (Allegretti, 2013).

Over time, the rate of mergers and rejections of projects by the municipal technical staff has remained more or less unchanged: for example, in 2010 31.39% (291¹) of the 927 original proposals were incorporated in the final list, while in 2013² the rate was 37.56 % (207 projects resulting from the 551 original proposals). There were, however, two significant

procedural changes throughout the various editions pertaining to the filtering phase, meant to reduce the distrust that this phase could generate in participants. The first refers to the fact that technical services, from 2012 onwards, contact the citizens responsible for the proposals before performing any merger of different (or differently located) proposals that could be perceived as "arbitrary". The second concerns the complaints period, part of the PB cycle since 2009 (with the release of a provisional list of projects in the second half of September, in order for citizens to comment on the result of the merger/integration/rejection of their proposals). Undoubtedly, the period of review of projects based on complaints has a short duration (less than a week), not allowing a space for further dialogue and clarification of doubts on the technical analysis and the mergers to be performed.

To offer a brief historical summary of changes to the Lx-PB model over time, it is worth mentioning that the outcome of the municipal elections in 2009 (with the victory of the

Table 1. The Lisbon PB in numbers:

Participatory Budget Cycle	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total No. of Votes	2809	4719	11570	17887	29911
Projects put to vote	89	200	291	228	231
Participants registered in the website	1732	6958	12738	26815	**
Proposals submitted	580	533	927 (492 in PAs* and 435 online)	808 (417 in PAs* and 391 online)	659 (288 in PAs* and 371 online)

Source: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa 2013

* PAs are the on-site Participatory Assemblies of the PB. ** Data missing in the 2012 PB report. The number of registered people is accumulated from year to year (while in other cities the registration is performed each year).

Table 2 – Characterisation of the participants

Characteristics*	2008 PB Participants via web portal (Lisboa Participa)	2009 PB Participants via web portal (Lisboa Participa)	2010 PB Participants via web portal (Lisboa Participa)	Participants in PAs	Participants in PSs
Age Range of the dominant group	35-55 years old	26-35 years old	26-35 years old	56-65 and > 65 years old	> 65 years old
Dominant Education Level	Higher Education	Higher Education	Higher Education	Higher Education	1st Cycle of Basic Education
Dominant relationship with the Municipality	Resident	Resident	Resident	Resident	Resident

*Each characteristic pertains only to the dominant group. Source: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, 2011 – www.lisboaparticipa.pt

¹ In "Relatório de Avaliação e Propostas da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa para o OP 2010-2011", page 28.

² In http://www.lisboaparticipa.pt/pages/noticias.php/A=259___collection=cml_news___L=___pageID=1 (accessed on 31/10/2013).

Socialist Party and the integration of two aldermen from other political forces previously involved in the process cycle in 2008/2009) favoured the institutional support to the PB.

Thus, in 2010, a bet was made in strengthening internal human resources, carrying out training courses for employees, partially open to citizens also; moreover, the “PB bus” was created which – by circling the city - allowed a better divulging and support during the presentation and voting of projects stages. These efforts were rewarded by a dynamics of significant growth in the number of participants, proposals and projects, as evidenced by Table 1.

The new on-site participatory spaces introduced in 2009 may have not contributed much to the increase of participants¹³, but it doubtless reinforced the legitimacy of the PB, gradually seeking to reduce exclusion through measures of positive discrimination.

Table 2, comparing the dominant types of participants in the first three editions of Lx-PB, shows how the introduction of on-site assemblies (territorial and thematic¹⁴) has diversified the public, integrating new social groups (with differentiated age, professional and literacy characteristics), formerly marginal in the process. The PAs also brought gains to the development of horizontal dialogue between citizens, reinforcing the quality of the proposals submitted to the City Council. In fact, in 2010, about 43% of the proponents formalized their participation through PAs and a significant percentage of the winning proposals were formulated and recorded there. The spaces for face-to-face interaction thus seem to trigger more solid ideas and encourage negotiations, creating convergences between players. The distribution of participants in tables (with the support of volunteer employees, coordinated since May 2011 by DIOP) allows a more open and horizontal dialogue. However, this organizational choice did not arrive at its natural consequences, since the PAs could act as a “filter” to the number of proposals, based on the level of participation created around them (as it happens in the city of Cascais). However, in Lisbon the number of ideas that can come from each table is not limited and those present are not required to enter selective negotiations; thus, the assemblies contribute to the redundancy of the overall number of proposals that proceed to the technical verification phase.

In fact, the CML continues today to encourage the presence of residents at PAs, allowing the submission of two proposals per person, while the web page only allows one per person. This clearly illustrates the general philosophy of the Lx-PB that, from the outset, maintained a strongly competitive nature, almost a “contest of ideas” (Dias, 2010), based on proposals submitted in individual name (although often developed in a group). This characteristic tends to favour the more organized groups and with the greater mobilization capacity, not ensuring the criteria of social solidarity and/or territorial redistribution in the allocation of the resources assigned to the process.

This line of evolution is not inevitable, as it could be countered if mechanisms for greater coordination between the participants were introduced in the proposal submission. The mobilization capacity seems to still be dependent on networks that pre-exist the PB. This fact is supported by the top rated projects in the first three editions: (1) bike lanes, (2) expansion of the Monsanto kennel/cattery and (3) construction of a municipal rugby field.¹⁵

Such dynamics have had heavy effects on the internal organization of CML’s “participatory machine”, given that such redundancy of proposals (and their frequent overlapping) required the creation of a team that, in the time limits established in each cycle, filters the suggestions submitted by the population, merging convergent ideas into coherent and articulated projects that can be submitted to public vote. The verification of the financial and legal viability of the projects also requires a “variable geometry” team, of an interdepartmental nature broader than the three technicians formally responsible for the general organization of the annual cycle of PB. Until today, such tasks may also have had a negative impact on the delivery dates of the projects approved in the different cycles of Lx-PB. The chronic delay is witnessed by the data provided by the Lisbon City Council¹⁶, where it can be seen that only 30% of the works of the last five years of PB were finalized by October 2013. Although the delays are, in some cases, attributable to factors that escape the powers of the City Council (bankruptcies, negative decisions of the Court of Auditors, etc.), it is clear that such a low rate of implementation of projects and the slow action of the City Council may trigger a loss of legitimacy of the process by generating too many expectations and frustrations on the citizens.

Given these inconsistencies, it is possible to conclude that there is an “instrumental” political view of the PB, that bets on the mechanism and in producing through it visible “presences” that are useful to the “benchmarking” of the Lisbon area (in terms of numbers of participants, the proposals submitted, etc.). However, the process displays – in subsequent stages - difficulties in “trusting” the inhabitants with a more active leading role in the control, filtering and merging of proposals.

The constant repetition of certain central elements in the initial model of the PB, six years later, suggests this interpretation which, incidentally, seems to correspond to the increasing perception of various social players involved in the process¹⁷.

3. The credibility of the PB in a context of crisis

As indicated by Avritzer (2009), the PB is simultaneously a very effective tool and a fragile one, as it depends of the political will to open it to a parity dialogue with the inhabitants and it is susceptible of being maintained under control through an “assisted” and partial opening. The fact that the PB is a voluntary policy and not an instrument provided for in regulatory frameworks makes it even more dependent on the political will of the moment, at the risk of undermining its sustainability and rooting in the territory and the trust of the population (Alves and Allegretti, 2012).

The various methodological changes of the Lx-PB over the years clearly reflect these risks of fragility. Between 2008 and 2009, the expansion of the proposals to 13 thematic areas originated difficulties in the uniformity of the analysis procedures is the different services. Proof of this was the incident in December 2009, motivated by the fact that about 40 proposals failed to be analyzed which, during the voting phase of the projects, resulted in a large number of complaints.

The political vision of the Mayor not only allowed the temporary suspension of the voting period and the revaluation of the proposals forgotten, but also introduced (for future PBs) a specific period to present and evaluate complaints. This measure avoided a boomerang effect for lack of transparency and trust in the process and assured the Lx-PB's visibility in the press, which may have contributed to the significant increase of members registered in the process in the next cycle by about 6958, having quadrupled the number of voters (from 1101 to 4719).

The experience served as an example for other processes taking place in the country. So today, almost every Portuguese PB includes procedural phases for filing claims after the stage of technical evaluation of the proposals submitted by the citizens.

However, the absence of a real debate (internal to the CML) on the need for a change in the “*a posteriori* selection/revision” of the ideas launched by the citizens may be indicative of a failure to understand a feature of the PB that other municipalities have explicitly addressed: the fact that it is a more general mechanism of “social construction of reality” (Allegretti, 2013) in which the perceptions of the citizens (in relation to the good intentions and professionalism of those who lead the process) count, often more than the actions that rule the operation of each participatory cycle. In this perspective, it would be important for the future that the organizers of the Lx-PB provided greater space to record and reflect on the assessments of the process made by the participants.

Such a reflection is even more important in the national context of economic and financial crisis, which has brought to the process a new challenge: to maintain credibility and the confidence of the citizens in the PB in a political context of financial restraint and political disbelief.

It is also worth mentioning that the fifth edition of the Lisbon PB was marked by a cut in global funds, which fell from EUR 5 million to 2.5 million¹⁸. This cut caused ample controversy at the level of municipal policy, which echoed in the media (especially because in those same days the CML granted financial support to the Rock in Rio festival¹⁹) but resulted in less criticism from society. In fact, such a “drastic” choice (as it defined by the political opposition at the time it was adopted) communicates a policy option that could have generated broad discontent. That did not happen²⁰ because the CML - simultaneously - bet on a new methodology capable of valuing opportunities for collective growth. For example, in 2011 the Lx-PB allowed for the first time the vote on two different groups of projects: one with the assigned value of 1.5 million Euros (for projects up to 150,000 €) and another with the value of EUR 1 million (for projects from 500,000 € upwards). Citizens were thus entitled to two votes and allowed proposals and votes on works of greater and lesser structural and financial dimension. This subdivision of categories of projects allowed for greater diversity of areas to be covered, beyond the commonly requested ones²¹ (Public and Green Spaces and Infrastructures). Thus, in 2012, 73% of the larger projects concerning the areas of environmental quality, comfort and accessibility of public spaces. In smaller projects were also covered the areas of tourism, culture and

economic promotion in 44%²².

Also since 2012, the Lisbon City Council strengthened the commitment to meet the deadlines for the completion of projects, established in less than 2 years (12 months to complete the projects budgeted up to 150,000 € and 18 months for those of higher value). This commitment of the City Council is important in view of the low rate of implementation of approved projects. However, it should be noted that, aware of this aspect, the CML now offers on its Internet portal²³, all information on the development of projects (in which it also explains the reasons for the delays). This portal allows citizens to monitor the state of implementation of the winning projects. This online update proves to be crucial in terms of transparency, as it increases the proximity between citizens and institutions, ensuring greater legitimacy to the PB.

Since 2011, other improvements were also gradually introduced to the Internet portal level (with new features and user-friendlier graphics), allowing a more regular²⁴ and diversified communication (with georeferenced maps of approved projects and videos on the different steps of the process). An effort was also made to improve the cycle of participation, expanding the complaints (including the entire month of September) and voting (from 30 to 45 days) phases of the proposals, preventing them from coinciding with the traditional holiday month and encouraging the participation of more citizens in the vote. The record of 29,911 votes achieved in the 2012 edition (see Table1) - which increased to 35,922 in 2013 - may be partially a result of these measures.

In the future, it may be useful to supplement the dominant quantitative evaluation made to date (centred in the number of participants /voters, proposals and projects) with more qualitative forms of assessment of the impacts of the Participatory Budget in the quality of life in Lisbon. The first opening in this direction occurred in the 2011-2012 biennium, as a result of a partnership with the “*Optar*” project²⁵, under which enquiries were distributed for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of Lx-PB. Some of the data thus collected helps analyse issues that may be central to the future sustainability of the PB. They mainly relate to the perceptions of the participants regarding their confidence in the implementation of the projects and meeting of deadlines, the transparency of the process, its intelligibility and its importance to city's future.

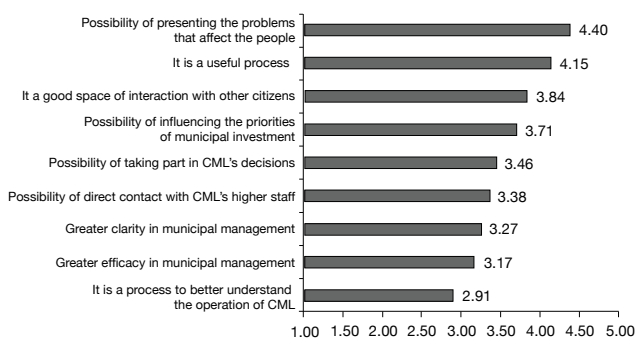
It seems appropriate to highlight four main findings of this review, which question some striking fundamentals of Lx-PB and their consistency with the general objectives expressed in the 2008 “Charter of Principles”:

1. The confidence of the participants on the compliance with the promised deadlines for completion of the works approved in the Lx-PB was very low and tending to decrease over time²⁶.
2. The assessment of the political commitment of the City Council with the Lx-PB is not very positive, due to a lower presence of the Mayor in acts related to the PB and a general distrust in public institutions, with the exception of social institutions (such as fire departments and civil protection), perceived as being almost

the only representatives of the positive presence of the State next to citizen²⁷.

3. The online voting mechanism is criticized for excessive proposals and lack of clarity of the web portal (which does not clearly identify the theme category of the projects presented or their georeferenced location). During the voting phase, only a minimum proportion of PB participants claimed to have read all the projects put to vote, while most adopted individual strategies to make their choice, like following suggestions from friends or just looking at projects in their own area of residence²⁸.
4. The procedure for entry and registration of voters is accused of lacking a careful supervision to ensure equal access to inhabitants, which could reward organized lobbies and subscribers who have used false names or emails. The lack of controls could affect the credibility of the process later on and deviates from the liberal-competitive perspective of the Lx-PB, where what counts should be free enterprise of every citizen to propose ideas and build critical masses of adhesion and collective consensus around them.

In this context it seems logical that, when asked what the meaning of this PB model is, citizens tend to refer primarily (as shown in chart 2) that the PB “allows you to expose the problems that affect people” and “favours dialogue among citizens”. This view of the results is consistent with the interpretation that the participants make of other complementary PB which, since 2011, is emerging in some parishes of the capital (such as Benfica and S. João, for example). There, the main objective is to build good diagnoses of the territorial issues, to better articulate governance and land management. What does not seem to be acknowledged is the potential of the PB to change the political culture of the rulers. Although the Lisbon PB is judged by most participants as “useful” it is not yet considered to be very incisive, both in terms of autarchic transparency and in the changing of the priorities of public management. In this sense, a recurring criticism of the open questions analyzed by the “Optar” project concerns the fact that the participatory cycle does not quite extend to the detailing, implementation and monitoring phase of the works object of co-decision.



Source: Relatório Optar de Lisboa, 2012

Figure 2: Significance of the Lisbon PB, average percentage of claims (significance values from 0 to 5)

Undoubtedly, it is necessary that - for the near future - these aspects be the subject of further consideration by the CML.

Indeed, the consolidation of the Lx-PB has coincided with the opening of other channels of participation, such as the Participatory School Budget (a similar process in 2011 for the youth of the Escola Básica 2,3 de Marvila school and that was extended to other schools in 2012), the local Agenda 21, the Priority Intervention Zones and Neighbourhoods Programme (BIP/ZIP), the revision of the Municipal Master Plan and the process of administrative reorganization of parishes and of the municipality²⁹. This is a significant transformation, based on a new image of the autarchy, named “Lisboa Participa”, which suggests that some of the limits identified in the PB are not necessarily addressed and resolved within it, but (at a time when CML seems to incorporate the principle of direct participation as a central element in the politics of municipal governance) taken into account in building better links between all these additional new participation tools.

5. Learning from others? An open conclusion.

Since its official recognition in 2008, the Lisbon PB has demonstrated optimal performance in terms of growth and rooting in the territory, valuing the ability to evolve progressively through the monitoring of both its effects and the perceptions of the participants. Despite this capacity to self-renew some methodologies and tools each year, the process has been losing part of its ability to impact, having reduced to half (since 2011) the amount available to citizens and having – as well – resized the resources assigned to communication and the efforts made to increase the number of assemblies.

Although having matured over time, the Lx-PB shares several typical limits with European participatory budgets, such as the high degree of experimentation, the small amount of investment for co-decision, the absence of redistributive justice goals and of true social inclusion, the relative timidity of the transformation and the lack of the ambition necessary to make the PB a boost capable of instilling greater transparency and accountability in the slices of the municipal budget not directly related to the participatory path (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2013).

Anyway, Lisbon has preserved the guiding principles contained in his founding “Charter”, seeing it almost as a “constitution”, able to guide some of the significant changes to be incorporated in annual regulations throughout its first six editions. Thus, the experience of the Lx-PB has become an important beacon for other Portuguese municipalities, being very stimulating because of its robustness and of the visibility given by the media to the capital city of a country described by the poet Eça de Queiroz as: “Portugal is Lisbon and the rest is landscape”.

Undoubtedly, both the initial amount of the PB (and later the School PB) and the innovative role of information technologies played a role in making Lisbon the centre of the change in the model of Portuguese Participatory Budgets (previously only advisory and raisers of specific funds). The creation of a team dedicated to participatory processes and of clear rules of operation were also very relevant, as well as the annual review of the process and the commitment to training.

The “evolutionary” nature of the participatory budget itself was an important element to articulate all these specific innovations and relate them to each other, added of the commitment to annually measure the degree of satisfaction of the participants to consequently improve the process. Undoubtedly, the fact that the Lisbon PB surpassed the classic consultative model, launched by the city of Palmela in 2002, helped forge a new DNA for Portuguese second generation PBs (Allegretti and Dias, 2009), centred on the co-decision aspect and on a greater organization of the city council as a result of the organisation and repeat of the process.

Despite this, and although faced with a public that seems to become, every year, more demanding, the Lx-PB has left some critical issues related to the model chosen unsolved. This, in fact, favours a formula similar to a “contest of ideas”, where the discussion of proposals has little space and what counts above all is receiving many proposals from individual initiatives of the proponents while the City Council plays a role of support and implementation of the top voted projects, without allowing the citizens to play a role in the co-planning of the implementation or even in the active control of the process.

Among the issues yet to be addressed are currently those related to (1) demand for higher deliberative quality in the stages of discussion of the proposals, (2) the need to reduce their redundancy through “filters” that are not technical, so that citizens perceive themselves as “core partners” in this phase, (3) and also the request for greater control over the identity of those enrolled in the participatory process, to ensure that everyone has equal access, preventing those who manipulate the process with ease from being rewarded when they try to circumvent the common rules to ensure greater success to their proposals.

In the process of emulation of the Lisbon experience, several Portuguese municipalities seem to have started to provide creative responses to these limitations. For example, Odemira and Condeixa (since 2010-2011) have faced the problem of the stricter control of registrations, creating for that purpose a password system that is linked to the one-stop services. Condeixa and Trofa have invested in a multiple vote system so that citizens are encouraged to read all the projects submitted before the final vote, rather than merely voting on their own project. The Guimarães PB scheduled over 48 meetings for 2013 to build a widespread network of spaces of dialogue about the content of the proposals (even in more remote villages). As for Cascais, this has been the municipality more capable of facing the unresolved problems of the Lisbon experience, particularly with regards to the good coordination of the PB with other instruments of planning and visioning. Since 2011, Cascais stimulated high quality debates on its citizen’s proposals, built ongoing training opportunities for technicians on participation techniques and involved citizens in the detailing and control of the completion of projects; most notably, it gave the participants in the PB an active role in reducing the redundancy of the proposals, without betting on “filters and bottlenecks” entrusted to administrative and institutional/political players, which could threaten public trust in the PB.

The hope is that, from this point forwards, Lisbon will not

renounce to drawing on creative solutions positively experimented in other cities, thus benefiting from the many contacts that its centrality guarantees, not becoming a prisoner of a self-referentiality that runs the risk of wasting the benefits that networking has ensured in many examples of the second generation of Portuguese participatory budgets.

A first indicator that such a position may produce positive results not only for Lisbon but for experiences throughout the country comes from a novelty introduced in 2013 in the voting of the Lx-PB projects. Inspired by the Cascais PB, the Lisbon City Council adopted the use of SMS as the main voting tool; however, upon realising that it was impossible to reach an agreement with all telephone companies for sending free SMSs to vote, it avoided the repeat of Cascais’ mistake (which abolished other forms of voting) and preserved the possibility of voting via the Internet and through the “PB bus” that travels the city during the entire month of October. Also, the commitment of Lisbon’s administration in promoting and co-organising the 2nd Meeting of Iberian PBs reflects the will to play a more humble and reflective role in the scope of the experiences in the peninsula, capable of simultaneously being a “receiver” and a “multiplier” of the different innovations that will quickly change the landscape of European participatory budgets.

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- 6 See <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk>
 - 7 The abstention rate was 62.2% (INE).
 - 8 Before the re-election in October 2009, the Government led by Costa had not secured a majority in the Municipal Assembly, for which the elections were not repeated in 2007.
 - 9 After the Administrative Reform imposed by Law 56/2012 the city is divided in 24 parishes, decentralised political and administrative entities created according to the old medieval parishes.
 - 10 The priority areas selected in 2008 by the participants were: “Road-works Infrastructures, Traffic and Parking” (123 proposals), “Public Spaces and Green Spaces” (122 proposals), “Urbanisation and Urban Rehabilitation” (62 proposals). Only proposals related to these areas were evaluated by the municipal services from a technical point of view. The remaining 273 proposals (in eleven other areas of competence of the CML) were automatically removed from the process.
 - 11 Representing 34.5% of the participants.
 - 12 “The results (...) are evaluated each year and the alterations necessary to the progressive improvement, deepening and widening of the process are introduced”.
 - 13 Polling stations (spaces of “assisted participation” for those who do not have an internet connection or computer literacy to be able to vote) in 2010 collected about 2% of the total votes. The same happened with the PB bus.
 - 14 The regional assemblies are developed in different parishes (grouping several areas); the so-called “thematic” assemblies are sectoral meetings which since 2010 allow the promotion of the PB with different social groups in the city, such as the elderly, children and university students. Between 2011 and 2012 meetings for foreigners, architects and designers, merchants and other target-categories were developed.
 - 15 The first was supported by the Portuguese Cycling Federation, the second by animal protection movements and the third by athletes and family members with a connection to the sport (Dias in Sintomer and Allegretti, 2013).
 - 16 Interview with the coordinator of the PB on 14th October 2013 (in the scope of the “OPtar” Project).
 - 17 There are clear convergences in that direction between the questionnaires distributed in the scope of the “OPtar” Project on which this article was based and the PB Reports prepared by CML in 2009-2012.
 - 18 The same ratio of cuts was applied to the School PB, a process for the participation of young students that, in the first pilot edition of 2010, included 50,000 Euros in investments.
 - 19 Rock in Rio is a music festival originated in Brazil, designed by Brazilian entrepreneur Roberto Medina and first held in 1985; since its inception it is acknowledged as the biggest music festival of the Latin world. It was originally organized in Rio de Janeiro but has become a world level event and, in 2004, had its first edition abroad in Lisbon, where it has been held 5 times.
 - 20 This is proven by surveys collected by the “OPtar” project, in which subjects reported their satisfaction with the value put to discussion. In 2011 (on a scale of 0-5), satisfaction declared by over 2800 respondents reached the mean value of 3.05 (above the average of the sufficiency of 2.5), while in 2012 the satisfaction rose to an average of 3.24 (OPtar Reports, 2011 and 2012).
 - 21 See CML’s 2011/2012 PB Report, page 24.
 - 22 See CML’s 2012/2013 PB Report, page 18
 - 23 See http://www.lisboaparticipa.pt/pages/orcamentoparticipativo.php?A=110___collection=cml_article (accessed on 30th October 2013).
 - 24 A notable exception concerns the scheduling of PAs, which dates are usually broadcast a few days earlier, and (in 2013) only much earlier in the process’ Facebook page.
 - 25 See footnote 5.
 - 26 On the question on general opinions regarding the PB, the “proposals approved in the PB are important and change the quality of life” collects an average of 3.93 (out of 5) for both years, while the option

Notes

- 1 Sintomer et alii, 2013.
- 2 See the news report published by “Público” newspaper on 28/04/2013 and several articles published in “Público”, “Diário de Notícias” and “I” between 2008 and 2012.
- 3 The Lisbon PB is not the first of decisory nature in Portugal, but it is the largest. Since 2006, there was the case of Sesimbra (52,000 inhabitants, a successful experience discontinued in 2011) which already provided for - as in the Brazilian models - the election of neighbourhood delegates to co-decide on an amount between 300,000 and 500,000 Euros (Sintomer and Allegretti, 2013).
- 4 Since its beginning in 1989, the Porto Alegre process assigned 100% of the investments to the PB, so (compared to other major cities) it has always been considered a radical experience. Anyway, this value has changed over time, decreasing widely - especially after a policy change in 2005 (proven by Langelier’s 2013 thesis and anticipated in the article published by Le Monde Diplomatique - Langelier, 2011)
- 5 It’s the project “O Orçamento Participativo Como Instrumento Inovador Para Reinventar as Autarquias em Portugal e Cabo Verde: uma Análise Crítica da Performance e dos Transfers”, funded by FCT

“the proposals approved will be implemented by the City Hall” collects an average of 3.93 in 2011 and down to 3.55 in 2012. The belief that the deadlines for the works will be respected gets a lower rating: 3.02 in 2011 and 2.99 in 2012 (Optar Reports 2011 and 2012). These averages are higher in questionnaires distributed in PAs, while the more educated public of the online questionnaires proves to be more hypercritical.

- 27 In the question pertaining to the level of confidence in the various political and social institutions, the participants in the 2012 PB mention a mean value of only 1.52 (out of 0 to 5) for the President of the Republic, 1.53 for the Government, 1.67 for political parties, 2.67 for city councils, 3.65 for Associations and 4.04 for fire departments and civil protection (Optar Report, 2012).
- 28 On a scale of 0 to 5, the satisfaction expressed with the assessment and merger procedures is, in average, of 2.98 (in 2011) and 3.02 (in 2012), while in 2012 only 14.8% of respondents declares having read all the projects before voting.
- 29 The Local Agenda XXI process (begun in 2012) is still incipient and aims to create a common interdisciplinary and cross-sectional (in the mid-term) area of debate on issues related to environmental sustainability. The BIP/ZIP Program - winner of the 2013 International Democracy Observatory Award - is supported by a special fund, which annually distributes resources to project proposals for problematic neighbourhoods of the city meant to boosting the economic, social and urban fabric through partnerships between different organizations active in the territory. A mandatory review of the Master Plan was required by law, to which the CML added a broad social debate which (in 2011) primarily involved organized and professional territorial planning groups. In the end, the path of social dialogue created for the administrative reform aimed to better support the reorganization of parishes, before the Government took rushed reform measures (based on the commitments of the Troika Memorandum concerning solutions for the crisis) ignoring the territorial and historical specificities of the local political and administrative division.